

## Life's Just Like That Sometimes by Oldfrailpizza

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Byers haven't moved, Gen, Hopper Lives, No Beta, Not Canon Compliant, Post Season 3, Steve Harrington's POV, Survivor Guilt, There are swear words, Warnings will go up for each chapter, Work In Progress, Billy is still dead, corporal punishment but really abuse, first person POV ish, implied child neglect, it's cute, might switch POV, people will cuss, so like don't murder me, there's a cat

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Carol Perkins, Dustin Henderson, Dustin Henderson's mother, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Parents, Tommy Hagan, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Past Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler - Relationship, Steve Harrington & Robin Buckley

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**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

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**Summary:**

Steve's introspection leads to an acquisition of a cat. Huh, maybe he shouldn't smoke so much weed.

# 1. And the cat calls to you

## Author's Note:

To preface:

-if there's spelling issues punctuation errors don't be afraid to tell me!!

-characters might seem pretty OC but it's cause I'm using their archetypes and adding some character traits of people I do know that fit the archetype so some people aren't just flat

-I totally don't know where I'm going with this, so -  
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-I'll updates tags and such as I go along

-I'll try and update consistently

- I'm ignoring the Byers leaving and Hopper dying because no

-Billy is still dead tho & a lot of other people are too

-starcourt still happened

## Summary for the Chapter:

What does weed, parent issues, and a cat have in common? Steve Harrington has all three.

He's staring at the sky from the roof of the car, watching the stars twinkle and the shadows loom overhead. He knows exactly what can hide in those shadows and has his scars and nail bat to prove it.

There it was.

That song. That just *ugh*.

Why'd the radio decide to play *that*.

It made him feel like his stomach was in knots and unsettled and jumpy all at once. Like his mind couldn't choose how to react so it just slapped a bunch of buttons and called it a day. He's letting himself run an inner monologue again and get sucked into his thoughts; not paying attention to the rustle of trees and not careful enough to hear a snap of a twig or the crunch of leaves underfoot. He lets himself spiral in self pity and inner turmoil. Maybe it's because the song reminded him of her. Her smile, her laugh, their jokes, their touches.

Maybe it's too much.

Maybe he's still a bit sore over their breakup. Kinda like poking an old bruise. Who's he kidding, he's still sore since there was never an official break up, if only an extremely delayed one that stemmed from an argument over a stupid party, over a stupid drink that got him called bullshit. And then it was *Nancy-and-Jonathan* and Steve was just Steve again, even if it was without his knowledge. And sure they eventually broke it off, but still. Knowing she cheated, at least by his definition, hurts, and not his pride or face that's been bruised, but by how little he mattered to her. Sure it seems self centered to think that way, but she obviously wasn't thinking about him she decided to sleep with Jonathan.

But, he's used to it.

Used to being second or none.

That or only wanted for something he can't control like his looks or his parents' money and alcohol they leave lying everywhere. He's surprised his parents never noticed, then again they'd actually have to be there to notice something missing.

They've been home exactly twice since the world's been saved by a bunch of kids for the third time. They never noticed anything different with him. Didn't notice the lights he leaves on or the blinds he leaves permanently closed in his room or how little he speaks and eats anymore. Hell, he doesn't even think they noticed how his face was still healing from the Russian beat down he got three week ago. Bruises still litter his face, but people seem to make less pitying looks at him now; no one's even asked who did it this time.

Maybe he's just old news, a story unimportant and eventually forgotten. He can't already be a has been, it's only been a few months since school's gotten out. But here he is, a dead end job at a movie store-

Did he just hear a crunch?

Listening keenly letting his spiraling thoughts swirl down the drain of his mind, he hears a quiet step.

Then another.

Like what ever's walking is activity being quiet, trying to stalk *prey*.

Holding his breath and slipping smoothly down the hood of his- well his *dad's*- car, he crouches down behind the wheel and stubs out his

blunt in the dirt, trying desperately to pinpoint where the noise is coming from. His blood is pumping and his adrenaline and anxiety kick in.

Then a cat ventures into the approaching daylight as the sun steadily rises. It's a small, skinny, sickly looking thing that has a bizarre resemblance to Mews.

Huh, maybe all cats looks like Mews.

Oh fuck, the sun's coming up and he's got a shift at the movie place at 10.

Fuck, Robin's gonna kill him.

As he starts to stand he hears more steps, only it sounds like there's multiple things heading towards him from far away. He stays crouch low still watching from behind the Beamer, thanking all the deities that makes leaves crunchy.

The cat walks towards the car, which fuck- he doesn't know what kind of disease this thing has- when he hears it. Some teenagers or adolescents, whatever the fuck they are, start making kissy noises and calling for something.

Oh right, the cat.

As he's about to stand and call out to them when he gets a better look at the cat. It's got a gash in its side and dirty fur that's matted down with who knows what.

Then it clicks.

He gets up, knees finally screaming in relief, and clicks the trunk open grabbing the bat automatically. He has to blink and shake free of *that* intrusive thought and grabs the towel he has stored there. Perfect size for swaddling a hurt cat.

It's beside the car, fairly close. It doesn't look harried or panicked even with the sound of the kids pressing closer and closer.

Shutting the trunk and slowly approaching the cat, Steve swoops

down and quickly ensnares the cat and hastily walks back to the car.

Well shit.

Now he has a cat, no sleep, and a shift in a few hours.

He swaddles the surprisingly docile cat and tries to set it in the passenger seat only for it to attempt to wriggle out and crawl towards him. He gives up the fight and moves the lump of cat and towel in his lap. Starting up the car and leaving the quarry and those fuckwads behind, he notices it's purring- quite loudly in fact.

His parents aren't home, he thanks small mercies and absent minded parenting.

Steve takes his precious cargo and is dumbfounded.

He went to the quarry to just stare mindlessly at the stars, smoke, and sulk- and now he has a cat.

Life's just like that sometimes.

This must be some good weed.

The cat softly meows and Steve starts up again, heading more into the house and looking at the clock reading 6 o'clock. Robin won't be up. Who is at this hour?

What the hell should he do with the cat?

Steve's feet carry him towards the bathroom. The smell is starting to make his eyes water, the poor thing will probably need multiple baths. He starts the tub, only filling it about two inches and unloads the ball of cat into the lukewarm water. It mews at him as it's feet touch the water.

"Aw, don't be like that."

"Mreow."

It struggles for a second before giving up and letting Steve gently pour water over its back. The ear and back scratches probably are

what placated it. He coos at the now more brightly orange tabby cat revealed under layers of dirt and grime. Multiple times he's unplugged and refilled the tub. A thick dirty ring paints the inside of the tub, but that's later Steve's problem.

Gently towel drying off the bony cat, taking extra care around the small cut on its side, Steve contemplates on naming it.

Mews II?

He can leave the naming up to Dustin, kid's probably be excited to get another cat after his first one.

On second thought, maybe Steve should give this one to Dustin.

But.

But he can't keep a pet. He's never had one, "too messy" his mother said and "too much responsibility for you" his dad replied, never looking up from his newspaper.

That was when they came to the house more often, when they had appearances to upkeep. Now he's more of a house sitter or maybe a hotel they spend a couple days out of the year in. They wouldn't notice. As long as he keeps it quiet, potty trains it, and hides it when they're there, he'll be fine.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Famous last words: it's gonna be just fine.

## 2. Movies & Cats (but NOT the movie Cats)

### Summary for the Chapter:

Adventures are a guarantee in this life Steve's decided to succumb to. In which Robin gets a glimpse at the mess Steve Harrington is and is there to support him.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm having fun with puns :)

Getting cat food should be objectively easy, but making sure no one saw *him* getting cat food was more difficult than he planned it to be. Anyone he knew could easily mention it to his parents and possibly get him kicked out of the house, which would suck, or make his parents make him get rid of the cat, which would also suck. And while he wasn't exactly the center of attention anymore, people still knew his name and still knew his face. He would see if he could get one of the little shits or little Byers or Dustin to do it since he's been their chauffer for a while, but this was a surprise for Dustin and he couldn't trust any of those kids to keep a secret from one of their members. So here he was, hair flattened, sunglasses on, and oversized jacket in an attempt to disguise himself while buying fucking cat food.

Jesus he kinda needed to get a life.

He also needed to hurry the fuck up or he'd be late to work and Robin would be annoyed with him, which leads to her to pettily ignoring him for a while and that doesn't feel good. He knows she bared a lot of herself to him when she came out to him, but he can't quite be this vulnerable to her. He knows she wouldn't really judge him, at least he didn't think she'd judge him too much but Steve doesn't exactly have a stellar record of befriending anyone that won't later hurt him or expect something from him in a transactional process. And he's "friends" with a bunch of nerdy, normal kids, even if one of them can move shit with her mind.

Once he gets the cat food and all but runs out of the store, he heads home speeding slightly. No one tries to stop him so he thinks he's done a good job not going too over the speed limit.

The cat is still there when he gets to his room, so officially not a fever dream.

He gets two bowls in the back of the cupboard, ones that his mom won't know is missing, and fills one with some dry food and the other with water. Coaxing the cat out from under his bed wasn't difficult, he just dangled some string and it came running out. He tries to pet the cat and gets a small purr in response. Then the cat spies the food filled bowl on the floor and promptly steps right in it. Steve picks up some dry food bits in his hand and coaxes it to try and eat out of his palm. It just sorts smooshes its face in his palm till it realizes it won't get any pats. He eventually gets it to eat and then runs to get a box from the garage and shoves an old towel in it. He places it on its side so the cat can crawl into. He looks at the clock and fuck, he's gotta get to work soon.

Styling his hair and getting ready usually didn't too long, but a certain orange creature kept tripping him up. He's able to leave with only having to nudge the cat away from the door with his foot twice before it gives up and leaves for more food.

He drives to the movie store and only has a mild freak out along the way. He sits in his car for second to settle his panicked expression and get ready to deal with tired reluctant moms, hyperactive kids, and possibly Keith.

Steve gets in the door and makes a beeline for Robin.

"Hey doofus." she tries to casually lean on the counter.

"I'm not late bookworm."

"You almost were, you almost left me with all these *people* " she says gesturing around an empty store.

"Sure, you'd suffer *soo* much" he replies rolling his eyes.

And he loves this, this easy banter they can have because of shared trauma and the secrets they keep. He loves this because he can see bags under her eyes and she doesn't have to pretend with him if she



doesn't want to. He can ask her how she's feeling and she'll either brush it off or answer honestly but she won't lie to him. And while it's not the most healthy thing to do, just brush off someone *really* asking about your well being because they *know*, it's what she needs to do at that time because there's always time to talk somewhere else. He almost talks to her more, almost spits out and ask why he's still hurt over everything else that happened, why he can't keep his priorities in check because shouldn't hurt feelings not mean much when you've looked death in the eyes and swung a bat at it? Instead he takes the cowardly way out, knowing she's gonna pester him about his bags and how his hair's not quite right.

"I got a cat." he says quickly when he sees her gearing up to ask, hoping to keep her unbalanced enough so he doesn't have to do the dance of don't ask about my sleeping habits last night.

She just blinks at him and shut her mouth. He can see the thoughts spinning in her head as she repeats his sentence again and again for some sort of explanation.

"uh okay?" She looks at him question hoping she won't have to pull the story out of him because, huh?

"I was at the quarry and this little orange tabby just ran up to my car. It's, uh, real friendly. S'kinda weird it didn't have collar. Was just gonna leave it there but then these ki- these little shits were callin' for it and then I saw the cut on its side and, well, now I have cat." Steve rambles while watching Robin's face scrunch up as he sped up and trailed off.

"And now you've got a cat?"

"And now I've got a cat."

"Well, what'd you name it?"

"uh, um, I uh, haven't really gotten around to it?"

"Wait, you saved a cat from creepy kids, took it home, and *didn't* name it?"

"It happened at like 6 ok? I wasn't exactly thinking much, it was just there then it was in my hands and then I was driving back. I'm surprised you're not more surprised at this."

"Steve, you're kinda impulsive. I wouldn't bat an eye if you decided to just adopt one of the little ducklings that follows you around."

Steve tries to hide his blush and looks away from Robin.

"Please tell me you at least left it outside or something?"

"I left cardboard box with a towel in it?" Steve sheepishly replies, knowing he's gonna get read a riot act.

"Steve!"

"What?!"

"You don't even know if the cat's feral or not! It could just" she makes sweeping hand gestures" piss everywhere. Youd don't know anything about that cat other than it was hurt and it's orange."

"I think it might've been someone's cat cause it sure as hell didn't seem feral to me."

"Cause that's so promising. Listen, I had a cat when I was younger, I can take a look at it for ya maybe see if we can find out who's it is."

"Right. Yeah. We, uh, could do that."

"Steve?" Robin says, tone bordering exasperated and fond.

"Yeah?"

"You already got attached to it, didn't you?"

"I. Well- it. Yeah."

And Robin, always the voice of reason says "We should see if anyone's missing a cat before you get too comfortable with the little fur ball."

And he can tell she didn't really want to say it, didn't want him to lose something he's just gained. He knows she sees things, notices how he favors specific cups, plays with this one charm on his keychain, and always wants to be anywhere but at his parents' house. He knows he could tell her, and maybe he'll tell her soon.

"Yeah" he reluctantly says. Lets his shoulders sag a touch and his posture slouch a bit. Not enough to where anyone would really notice unless they're looking, but Robin's always been more perceptive than Tommy and Nancy didn't really ever ask. He's not used to seeing creases between someone's brow over him, he doesn't think it'll ever get old- feeling important enough to someone that they worry over him.

Robin gives him a sad tinged half smile and tries to talk about something else.

"So I think my parents are leaving me here for a trip they're taking.

They're calling it a late anniversary. I know someone who's got good weed."

Steve just laughs, light little things, wispy and breathy. He wants to say *"that's kinda how I got the cat in the first place"* but she's being nice, giving him this out, letting them talk about mindless things instead. So he just says "uh huh."

"Yeah, so we could.."

And Steve just lets the conversation flow.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Just a heads up, thinkin' about adding a Tommy and Carol redemption arc as well as letting Nancy and Jonathan develop more as people and not props for Steve's issues to be projected on. Also btw Nancy seems kinda mean but that's bc Steve's still hurt so his opinion will cloud how he thinks of people, that's why Robin seems so angelic and on a pedestal.

### **3. Adorable Little Fur ball**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Steve and Robin talk about the cat. We get to see a bit more interaction between the two.

#### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Warning: mentions of child abuse and neglect, not in detail but still mentioned

Once their shift is over, Steve drives Robin to the house so she can look at the cat for herself.

He gets in the door and miraculously nothing seems out of place. There's no tears in the drapes, no toilet paper shredding anywhere, nothing knocked over, it all seems normal. He leads Robin to where the box and bowls are. They both crouch down and peer inside the box where an orange tabby calmly takes an afternoon snooze in.

"It looks like the fuzz ball didn't do anything to your place."

Almost dizzy with relief Steve whispers "Yeah" only to clear his throat and reply more surely "Yeah, seemed like a good cat."

"Steve ya doof, you told me you thought it was a stray."

"Well I... shit, you're right. But it acts like a house cat, right?"

"Hm I guess we'll find out." Robin replies, sticking her hand in the box to wake the sleeping tabby.

The cat seems unafraid of her hand petting its head and even leans into it. It ventures out the box once Robin retracts her hand. It sniffs a bit and then ambles up to Steve, sticking its head up and rubbing against him while quietly purring. Steve, looking a touch helpless and confused, pets the cat from head to tail letting it arch up into his hand. He can feel its spine and see its ribs expand from breathing. The gash he thought he saw on its side seems better, it's less deep than he thought and already scabbed up- he'll need to ask Robin what to do about that.

"You had just found that cat right? It seems like this little guy was

definitely a house cat and most likely an indoors cat at that."

"How'd you figure that?"

"The small things, like: how he didn't run from me or you, how he's fine with being in your house, how he hasn't tried clawing at us despite being injured."

"Oh."

The cat settles beside Steve then, curling up in a loose ball. Steve lets his hand rest on its side. He just realizes he's yet to look at Robin since the cat came out and crawled all around him and when he looks up at her he finds her studying both him and the cat closely.

"What?"

"Nothing, just- just don't get too attached, it could be somebody's cat."

"Right."

And just when he thought he could get used to something good. But things are always like that, contingent on something else he can't control yet wishes so much he could. There's a lot he wishes he could do, could fix, could change- but there's not much to wishing, especially when you know wishes get you nowhere real fast. Robin's staring at him now, as if she could read his mind and see everything going in his head. Maybe she could, he wouldn't put it past her, being so smart she's got to know things about himself he doesn't even know.

"It could easily be someone's cat they can't keep or didn't want."

She trying to placate him, maybe he's too much of a mess and starting to bleed through too much. She shouldn't have to deal with this, with him. She's had so many chances to bail out on him, like Nancy did, but she's still here, still willing to listen as he is to her so that's gotta count for something.

"Yeah, those shits were chasing it into the quarry."

"Do you want to make found posters or wait for someone to put up lost posters?"

That's not really a fair question to ask, or well at least not a question he wants to answer. He knows he should yes to either, to give the cat back to someone who may come forward, but it's soft and sweet and

just about everything he thinks he needs right now. He could use someone to keep safe, keep from the monsters-interdimensional or not- and creeps of the world and beyond. It'd be nice to have something like that, but he has a nail bat, lights on in the empty house, and kids to call if shit gets *real* bad.

"I'll wait."

And the look Robin gives him makes him think it wasn't really a question, just a trick to get him to admit it out loud and make him keep this like a promise. She looks down at the cat then back at Steve, like she's waiting for him to mess something up or like break down he guesses. She always has this gentle look in her eye when she knows he needs it, even when he couldn't always tell he needed something other than bickering and being called an idiot. What's so great and yet so dangerous about Robin is she really delves deep when she wants to know something or someone, like she learned fucking *Russian* and now she knows *him* better than he knows *himself*. She's like the sibling he never got to have, the one he always wanted, or maybe he just never wanted to feel alone and she fills that void whenever he sees her. He knows he's got abandonment issues but that shouldn't take away from her being so amazing. He knows if given the chance, he'd try to get to know her during high school, because in the end- the popularity, being 'king'- it was all just bullshit anyways.

"C'mon lets listen to something. I brought a tape with me, I think you're gonna like this one."

And there was a life raft offering Steve an out from his swirl of thoughts. Hiding a smile to himself while lazily petting the cat, Steve replies "You always say that Robin."

Without missing a beat Robin swiftly says "Well I always mean it. S'not like it's my fault you don't listen to anything good."

Off again they do their little routine and banter back and forth while the cat drapes its self over Steve's lap. When Robin fishes out a blunt, Steve scooches the cat off his lap, ignoring the small mreow he gets in protest and heads outback- never knowing when his parents will be back makes for him to be overly cautious. Getting caught with weed once and he might find himself getting kicked out with only the clothes on his back, he still remembers the bruises from getting

caught reeking of alcohol the one time they'd unexpectedly came home. The cat dutifully follows him to the door and tries to go out too.

"Seems like he hasn't pissed everywhere in your house and certainly hasn't done anything worse, might want to let him out before he ends up doing so."

"Okay, fine. Just worried it'll run off and I won't be able to catch it in time."

"We can be very careful."

"Not if we're high."

"He'll need to go out sometime, might as well be now while it's still light out."

"I guess you're right- wait he?"

"Yeah, you didn't check?"

"There were other things going on at the moment, didn't really think about studying it's junk."

"Okay *gross*, and I wasn't staring, it's real easy to check."

"Yeah, yeah. So it's a he, huh."

Robin opens the back door and Steve follows her out away from the pool. At first the cat sticks by Steve, but eventually takes to walking around the backyard. They do end up smoking because "the music sounds better this way doofus" and because Robin is facing the cat too, keeping her promise of watching the cat as well.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

If Steve's parents came home he would totally say the cat was Robin's and she'd let him.

## 4. Goodnight and Goodmorning

### Summary for the Chapter:

Nights and mornings and routines and something new to the mix too. Steve, Robin, and the cat begin to establish a routine.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Warning: Mentions of child neglect

Robin ends up sleeping over because her parents are gone and Steve's aren't ever really home. They stumble up to his room tired after smoking out back and corralling the cat back inside with kissy noise giggling and promises of treats. Steve did give the cat a small piece of cooked beef he had in the fridge. It was hard to cut with Robin making funny faces at him the whole time and trying to say words that sound wrong and sorta tasted funny. When they did get up the stairs and struggle just the tiniest bit with the door, they just plopped onto the covers of a made bed. Steve, while not necessarily the most cleanly neat freak still made his bed religiously and kept everything that was considered *untidy* and *unbecoming* of a man hidden under sheets, in closets, and under his bed.

Both he and Robin didn't care about sleeping in the same bed, especially after the first time it accidentally happened. Once things had began to settle down and fires were put out, soldiers were left behind, and Hopper was in intensive care, they were left with this growing sense of unease- like life can't ever be too easy since shit was always happening.

One night Steve pleaded asked Robin to come over because the shadows grew too much and the pool was shining so brightly and *bullshit* was ringing through his head. She didn't even question it, just headed over and they talked till their mouths felt like cotton and throats were dryer than the Sahara desert. They eventually fell asleep on Steve's bed, over the covers and he'd never felt more warm than that. So it was kinda a given that unless Robin needed to be alone, she'd sleep with him on the bed. They didn't need to make it weird and there really wasn't much to it other than knowing you're safe



and someone's got your back. She even has some clothes over at his now, with how often she stays over. It's not extremely often since she's still in high school and her parents are worried about where she's going, but Robins smart and knows who to lie about and careful to not repeat something too much.

Steve knows this is getting into heavily codependent behavior, but well who else can they tell? Where else can they go? Nancy and Jonathan have each other and their siblings too, Mrs. Byers is frazzled and busy with watching Hopper heal and her boys grow and looking after a budding teenager who did shit with her mind, and the kids are pretty good at supporting one another, so odd ones out make them rely on each other a bit more than anyone else. Sure, Robing could probably talk to Jonathan and Nancy at school since they're in the same year, but Steve thinks Robin's a bit hypercritical of the relationship debacle between Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve and has a bit of a frosty shoulder towards Nancy and Jonathan- which isn't really something he wants her to have. And yeah, things didn't end *well* but they all almost died together and they all know something tried to kill everyone, isn't that enough to mostly ignore personal drama?

They laid on the bed facing one another, knowing eventually one Steve fell asleep he'd will find his way towards Robin, seeking out warmth like a leech. There've been some awkward moments waking up, especially since Steve is a cuddle monster and human octopus, but nothing too bad that they couldn't make fun of down the road.

So here they were in Steve's room on Steve's bed with a cat, he couldn't be more content- well there's a few things he could want, but it's never gonna happen so he doesn't set himself up for all that failure and broken expectations. And it's pretty great, knowing Robin's there to wake him up after a nightmare or vice versa.

They run out things to say that really make sense, now they just sorta tiredly giggle at nonsensical things that flash randomly in their minds. Sometimes they have heart-to-hearts during this time of night, when the light from Steve's lamp holds golden and the pressure and panic and mania they feel has dissipated, dusted off by laughs and high minds.

"Steve"

"mm" Steve hums in reply, tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth with mind full of cotton and eyes less gaunt.

"How're you gonna raise your cat?"

"hm, Idunno. How do ya think I should raise it?"

"Him"

"hm?"

"It's a dude, remember?"

"Okaaay, how should I raise **him**, Robin?" Steve sits up on his elbow and faces Robin where she laying beside him.

"Give him food and a litter box obviously, which you got mostly covered. Besides that you might need to go to the vet once in while and you definitely need to give him a collar, ya know regular pet stuff?" Robin nudges more towards Steve, looking up at him with this concentrated face only a high person pulls when thinking about basic thoughts.

"Never had a pet before." Steve replies, watching the cat jump down off the bed and sit contently beside the bed.

"Yet you decided to take him in, doofus" and she says this so softly and fondly Steve wishes he could just save this moment forever, let it burn into his memory and his heart.

"mkay" Steve replies laying back down beside Robin, their arms and legs brushing constantly reminding them that there's someone there, that they're there for eachother.

Once Steve's breathing has evened out Robin warmly whispers, "Goodnight doofus."

No nightmares, huh. This isn't uncommon, but not exactly common either. Time heals all wounds is such a bullshit saying, but not completely wrong. Time can dampen their trauma and make the memories weaker, but they will never be who they once were, that's for sure. Steve wakes up when whiny meows began to get louder and closer to him. Robin just scrunches up her face and tries to bury herself further in the pillow and snuggle harder back in bed. It's fairly early in the morning and while Steve hasn't gotten much sleep the cat won't shut up. Steve has to crawl over Robin and, once the cat saw him moving and began to walk toward him, the cat too.

Steve grabs the bag of cat food from under his bed and heads downstairs with a chipper cat chattering after him. He pours what looks like the right amount in one bowl and mindfully steps around some dry food bits surrounding the bowl on the floor to then replace the water bowl. The cat is happily munching away and blissfully

quiet. Steve might as well begin his morning, knowing trying to go back to sleep once leaving the warmth of his bed is nigh impossible. He starts the coffee maker and sits on the couch watching the tabby eat, drink, and stalk towards him for entertainment. Being too tired to try jerking around string, Steve just lets the tabby crawl up his legs with its sharp paws. The cat settles on his lap and the smell of coffee begins to reach his nose. Robin'll be up soon, always waking once she smells coffee. And with the cat quietly purring in his lap and Robin upstairs and the glow of morning, Steve thinks this is what he wants his life to be like. Sure it's not perfect, far from it and planets away from what he envisioned two years ago, but it's content and warms Steve through and through.

Robin heads down when the coffee is ready and Steve pours himself a cup. Robin tsks him when he doesn't offer to make one for her, but she's not a guest anymore, she's his family and that means making your cup - it means all sorts of things he'll never tell her until he feels ready to bleed himself dry and let her know just *why* he is what he is, but he won't give the same treatment because when you love someone you don't treat them quite like that. Robin took the comforter off Steve's bed and was mostly wrapped up in it, but once they got their mugs, she graciously decided to share when they decided to bask in the dwindling golden rise of the sun. Steve lets the cat out and he and Robin sit side by side watching the sun trek across the sky.

Steve- hesitant to break this peaceful moment, one of few they'll have- asks, "Will you get a collar for me?"

Robin looks confused for a second before understanding settling across her face. "Sure, but I'll get a hot pink one."

Steve huffs out a small laugh, watches as it crystalizes and evaporates in the crisp autumn air. "Fine, but get a bell on it."

"A bell huh" Robin jokes and softly jostles Steve.

"Yeah"

"Alright" she gently says once she sees his eyes go distant.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

So uh whoops, ment to update sooner. I will name the cat the next chapter and I plan to add more characters in the mix, the tags aren't for show.

## 5. Cared for Sweetly

### Summary for the Chapter:

The cat gets a name! Steve also talks to other people, wow.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions of minor character death and implied child neglect.

"Steve," Robin asks, turning to face him once the sun has gone up high enough for Steve to spur into action and begin to gear up for going to work without Robin, "What're you naming him?"

And that, that's a good question. What should Steve name this orange, sweet, gentle tabby cat? Mews the second doesn't sound right, doesn't sit right with him either considering how Mews originally died, so what should he name him?

"Ginger." And Steve gets a bit of a look from Robin with how surely he says this.

"Ginger?" Robin says, trying it out and questioning his reasoning all in the same word.

"He's a ginger and it's cute."

"mm" Robin hums, turning to face the cat- *Ginger* as of now, watches him wander around and sniff some leaves.

"And well, I've always loved gingersnap cookies." Steve hesitates a second before tacking on "My grandma, she had the best recipe for them, they were chewy and soft but never doughy. I missed her so much when we stopped visiting her as often, and then" Steve pauses, clears his throat softly and leans into Robin for support "and then when she passed and I got the recipe it was like I could remember her so clearly, almost like she was there with me in the kitchen. There's always powder ginger in the spice rack so whenever I feel like it I make 'em."

Steve feels like he ripped off a bandaid he should've left on a little longer. He feels his skin get a bit tight and buzzy, but it's Robin and she wouldn't hurt him when he's vulnerable to her. Yet he needs to get

up and move all the same, even when she isn't looking at him. So he gets ready for work and prepares himself for having to put up with Keith being petty all shift . Steve leaves, fully trusting Robin'll bring Ginger inside and will be there when he gets back from the movie rental store.

Tired and a touch cranky from his shift with Steve doesn't notice two figures lurking outside the doors when he leaves the movie store. But he sure as hell notices them when he steps out and almost runs right into them. Tommy and carol are staring at him and Steve doesn't know what to do.

And he wants to run, mind even shouting it while his legs remain still and frozen like a deer in the headlights.

They approached him right outside of work when Robin can't be used as a buffer since she's not *here*, she's watching Ginger.

They stand there and Tommy shuffles his shoes awkwardly like he always did when they were young and he didn't know what to say but needed to say something. Carol looks mildly uncomfortable, taking Tommy's lead for a bit until no one speaks. Once she opens her mouth, Steve magically gets his limbs to listen to his head and begins to walk quickly back to his car. He hears footsteps follow him and once he reaches his car then does Carol call out "Steve".

And Steve just stops.

His key is out and he's not ready for what vitriole they'll spew next, but he freezes all the same and doesn't turn around, doesn't want to give them satisfaction if they try to cut him with words again.

"Steve" Carol says again, almost soft.

"Steve" Tommy begins and Steve's fist clench, shoulder rear up, eyebrows crunch and he turns.

"Liste I know we did things wrong--"

"You think!" Steve explodes, face feeling warm and hand hurting from squeezing the key, nails digging into the meat of his palm in the other hand.

"We know! We know we hurt you! And what we did was wrong" Tommy says placatingly putting his hands out and adds painstakingly and softly " and we're sorry. We really are."

Tommy and Carol came closer but not enough to make Steve feel

boxed in. Steve stands numbly, this is not what he expected when they followed him. His face loosens from its deadly and enraged glare to a frigid and angry look while his palms are less clenched and shoulders relax a fraction from reaching his ears.

“We really are sorry Steve, we should’ve been less shitty. We were close once and, and we should’ve known better.” Carol says with hope and sadness dripping from her words and her eyes. She stands closer to Tommy as she said this like he’s her support and will keep Steve from running.

And Steve needs a moment- no a *year*- to fully understand just what in the hell is going on.

They both stand there staring at Steve, as if their eyes will force some words out of him. And Steve just doesn’t know what the hell to do about it, but then again when does he know anything?

“I” Steve pauses, wets his lips and relaxes his shoulders a bit more, “I was shit too.”

And that’s the crux of the matter, Steve ran to them when he felt vindictive, hurt, and mean and once he felt like shit after they harrassed Nancy and Jonathan, he took it out on them. He knows he started this mess, this fight that broke them apart and set him adrift. But he knows how wrong it was and is to do that, to feel that. He knows now that anger won’t hold you warm in your imminent grave and pettiness brings nothing but fines and hurt feelings and unhappy endings.

“I was shit too, I pushed you away and you retaliated because you both were hurt. And I’m sorry.”

“Steve” Carol begins, stepping closer reaches out and almost grabs his hand when she sees his shoulders droop and head falls forward, hair shielding his eyes but stops short, “we missed you so so much and, and maybe we could talk more sometime?”

“Yeah. Yeah, okay. Just, just not right now.” Steve says carefully, catching the hopeful look shared between Tommy and Carol.

“Yeah Stevie, we can do later. You have our numbers, call when we can talk.” Tommy replied with a hint of a smile and a lighter tone.

And just like that they leave and Steve is confused and tired and ready to see Robin and Ginger waiting for him. He's willing to bet Robin'll know what to do.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

So like I never really was ok with how things between Steve, Tommy, and Carol ended and this is how I'll remedy it. This is when people will definitely be more OOC because I want to redeem people and keep them from falling flat.

## 6. The Choices We Make

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve talks to Robin about Tommy and Carol. Other characters are brought up briefly but that won't be the only appearance.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions/implies both physical and mental abuse

So Steve drives home with an absent mind.

He really shouldn't do that, might hit someone with his car but like well who could he ask to pick him up? Robin wouldn't actually be able to pick him up and the walk from his house to the rental store is killer. So against good judgement- which Steve's gotta face wasn't ever all that *good* -he drives.

His face must be really blank or pulling some horrible look since Robin's lookin at him likes he gonna die. She has on that "let me help, I want to help you feel better" look and Steve just takes a breath before he spills his guts about everything going through his mind. Ginger either senses his internal freak out and tries to distract or is just a really determined and cuddly cat as he claims his lap the second he sits down and plays with his hands anytime he moves them. Ginger sorta distracts his freak out a bit, manages to take him from a 9 to about a 5 which is helluva lot better than what he usually does to calm himself.

Robin sits quietly throughout his word vomit. She makes small minute faces but doesn't try to interrupt or say anything when he pauses and tries to word things better. She waits patiently and asks when he's done reciting how Tommy and Carol talked to him in front of the store and how it sent him into a panic.

"Steve."

"Yeah" Steve replies uncertainty and watching as Ginger paws at his hands gently.



“Are you ready to forgive them?” And this makes Steve pause because huh. He knows he was kinda an asshole to Tommy and Carol and held onto that guilt with an iron grip but they said said mean things- hurtful things too. Tommy was Billy’s fuckin second hand man and went along with all his posturing and fuckery. Carol was frigid towards him and Nancy and downright nasty to Jonathan, but she might’ve just been taking Tommy’s lead on that one.

Huh.

“I... I think so?”

“You think so?” And if Steve didn’t know Robin speak so well he would’ve thought she was being derisive, but she’s really just giving him a chance to have a sound board.

“I, yeah.” Steve swallows still petting Ginger, “We did shit things to people all the time and when I suddenly wanted to stop, stop essentially being who they thought I was, it must’ve sent them for a spin. Didn’t help that Nancy was the one to set me straight, helped me see what an ass I was being. And I really could’ve done a lot better at telling them to tone down how shitty we treated people. And when they reacted badly I just went on worse until I got tired and didn’t give them the satisfaction of reacting to then anymore. I was so fucking *pissed* at Tommy becoming one of Billy’s fucking *lackeys*,” Steve’s voice raises slightly and Ginger hopped down from his lap, “like he didn’t even *care* about Tommy, he didn’t care about anybody!” Steve clenched his fists in his lap and looked up at Robin. “And just, fuck.” Steve’s hands relax and he rubs his face hard before Robin grabs one of his in her own. “I miss Tommy and I miss Carol. As bad as we were, we were good friends to each other and we cared about each other. That’s not an easy thing to fake.” Robin let’s go of his hand, sits back in the couch and watches Ginger play with the string toy she started dangling in front of him.

Steve feels a bit rung out, a bit tired, and a bit like weights have shifted off his shoulders. It ain’t no easy breathing, but he feels lighter as cliché as that is. He’s glad Robin isn’t staring him down and analyzing his face right now, being under that scrutiny would make his skin crawl.

“What’re you gonna say to them?”

And that was the million dollar question, wasn't it? He couldn't just say it was water under the bridge because he'd be lying and he promised Carol he'd never lie to her and he couldn't say he hadn't forgiven them either. He was in the process of forgiving them and maybe even trusting them again. He couldn't ever fully trust them, never like what he had with Robin or anyone else who knew about Jane and his ragtag kids, but he could trust the promises they kept. Tommy never made a joke about Steve's intelligence once when they weren't friends. He never said shit about what a dumbass Steve was and that's kinda what made things worse and better. Tommy kept his promise despite them not being friends meaning he still cared for Steve but was complacent and even joined in on the bullying and shitty creepy things Billy and his crew did to people and especially to Steve. Steve knows it's wrong to speak ill of the dead, especially since Billy saved the kids from being eaten by the fucking horrific and nightmare enduring flesh tower monster, but Billy was an asshole. He was an asshole that was racist, controlling, and possibly abusive towards Max- though she'd never tell anyone, maybe it because he's dead and did the whole "turned to the light" a few second before death or maybe it's cause she'd have to admit to being vulnerable and be seen as less strong than the front she puts up for the party. Billy may have saved everyone but that doesn't excuse his past actions, doesn't absolve him of his transgressions. Steve isn't even absolved of all the shit he did to people, he knows he's caused lots of tears and possibly even mental health issues.

It's just, they kept their childhood promises despite the anger and hurt that tore them apart. Sure, Steve wanted to have more friends again but most of all he wanted to have Tommy and Carol because they all cared for each other and it wasn't all transactional, at least not completely.

"I think I'm just gonna tell them- tell them all the shit they did was hurtful and piercing and that I won't be able to ever fully trust them again. They hurt me Robin, so fuckin bad but they also kept their promises. Just, what the fuck? They let people step all over and they even stomp on me themselves but they didn't go for the cheapest and deepest shot they had. It's kinda fucked up how I still knew they cared that way." Steve watches Robin stop dangling the string for Ginger to chase.

"Sometimes someone showing how much they care is fucked up." Robin says in a softer and slightly watery tone.

"Yeah." Steve agrees, sounding older than anyone his age. "You said it."

Steve feels a little surprised that Robin didn't get all cagey when he mentioned Billy and accidentally referenced the **mall**. Usually they both feel horrible and squeamish when they think about it because out of everyone that the monster absorbed? consumed? they survived and it just isn't a thing they like to think about or talk about. Maybe they're getting better, this is the first time Steve's thought about the **mall** and didn't feel an immense weight of guilt crushing him.

"Let's go out back, let Ginger out for some fresh air." Steve says in a voice tinged with happiness and hopes to dissipate the slight melancholic feeling in the air.

"Sure doofus, c'mon." And Robin's looking at him with warm eyes and a small uptick on the corner of her mouth, a half smile making itself known.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Just to clear things up, Steve doesn't know much about Billy and can only know things he's seen. We might learn more about other characters.

Also since Billy is dead, should I use the main character death warning?

## 7. Ginger gets a friend

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve, Robin, and Ginger get a visitor.

### Notes for the Chapter:

mentions/implies emotional abuse

“So how are the ducklings?”

“Mmm?” Steve briefly glances at Robin then diverts his gaze back to Ginger. He knows Robin feels a bit uncomfortable with the silence and wants to disrupt it anyway she can after thinking about the **mall**, even if it was only referenced and not specifically mentioned, cause Steve's feelin a touch antsy and squirmy with leaded guilt in the pit of his stomach.

“Ya know? Your *kids*?” Robin's lookin at Steve intently, he can feel it on the side of his face while his eyes stay glued to Ginger who he's playing with. She knew about how Dustin lost Mews and how Steve has a soft spot for the kids, especially Dustin and Jane and maybe also Max. He's not afraid to play favorites and cares deeply for those shits that endanger themselves without a second thought for anyone within the party. That isn't to say he doesn't take responsibility for all the kiddos, even Mike the contentious sarcastic little shit.

"For the most part they seem alright, never gonna be fine cause ya know **everything** but they seem stable at the moment. In fact, I think it's about time someone meets the Ginger." Steve says proudly, hefting Ginger in his arms and cradling him close to his chest like a precious baby only for the cat to squirm seconds later and mew to be let down. Steve promptly opened his arms and Ginger, with all the grace of a beached whale, flops down onto the floor landing on his legs and taking a moment to garner his bearings then, with what little dignity he has left, sticks his butt up at Steve before sauntering away. Steve only looked partially betrayed and sad. Robin, familiar with Steve's antics, only laughed a lot. Once she regained her breath and wiped her eyes, yeah Steve's pretty sure she smoked some without him which *rude*, she asks "So who're you gonna show Ginger to first?"

“Weeeelllllll” Steve draws out obnoxiously earning a playfully soft punch in the shoulder, “I think I’m gonna let Dustin have the honors, he’s bound to come by soon enough” or at least Missus Henderson-wait no-*Claudia* might call for a babysitter if he isn’t busy- which he *never* will be for Dustin, kid’s like a little brother to him. He was at one point closer to Dustin than he was with Robin but after, after the **mall** Steve’s been spending more time with Robin and Dustin’s been busy being in young love with Suzie and keeping up with all the shenanigans the party gets up to. That’s not to say they haven’t been talking or seen each other, Claudia loves Steve and thinks he’s an alright older male role model for Dustin and Steve isn’t discouraging to Dustin’s weird interests unless they endanger his or other people’s safety. Never gonna let the kid, or *any* kid for that matter, have a weird pet of any sort *ever*. Amphibians are cool and all, but **no** never again will there be a Dart situation.

Just then the doorbell rings and Steve meanders over to open it *and* speak of the little devil and he shall appear.

Dustin, the picture of patience, pushes past Steve sparing a brief look and a passing “You took *forever*, anyways I found this new book about-” and freezes. Steve dutifully follows to where Dustin stopped and takes in the sight of Robin dangling the makeshift cat toy in front of Ginger.

“Steve, you’re aware there’s a cat in your house, *right?*” Dustin looks at Steve for a second in disbelief then walks up to where Ginger is chasing and pouncing and sits down watching the cat.

“Yes.” Steve utters, fondly exacerbad. “Name’s Ginger.”

“Steve.” Dustin kinda whines looking him, then back at the cat.

“What?”

“That’s the *least* creative name *ever*.” And Dustin says this looking at Robin and shares this *what are we gonna do with him* look.

And, wow, this is what family is; knowing what their faces say and how everything, even the ribbing and teasing, is playful with no hint of bite or trying to underhandedly cut at him.

“As cute as this conversation is, wanna take over entertaining this furball?” Robin says dryly and continues on with a coaxing “I’m getting a bit tired and I’m sure Ginger would love to be pet.”

“Sure, yeah.” Dustan enthusiastically reaches for Ginger and scritches behind his ears.

Despite Ginger's lax and relatively friendly demeanor, Steve tenses, worried for a second about the state of Dustin's hand, but it's all for not when Ginger happily leans heavily into the scritches and lets Dustin pet him.

“So when'd you get him?” Dustin asks distractedly by the cat demanding *all* of his attention and *all* the pets.

Steve doesn't quite want to tell him that he found Ginger and that the cat isn't *really* Steve's, at least not yet. The scratch that was etched into Ginger's side was effectively gone and mainly just slightly hairless. Robin's advice of gently rinsing the cut and adding a touch of Neosporin and making sure Ginger didn't lick the Neosporin of worked well, maybe not as well as what a vet could do but hey the cat's just fine, especially since Robin took care of all of it.

Robin takes all the words out of his indecisive mouth when she answers for him. “He found him yesterday morning. Some kids were terrorizing him and so Steve, like the martyr he is, stole the cat.” She walks back into the living room with a can of soda and sit down on the couch making herself comfortable before continuing, “We don't know if it's someone's but we're waiting it out to see if wanted posters pop up around town.”

“Wait, so I'm petting a *stolen* cat that *you* named Ginger?” Dustin looks at Steve and must've stopped petting Ginger since he meows for more attention that draws Dustin back into action and resumes petting the cat.

Sheepishly Steve answers softly “Yeah” and with more of his usual sure bravado, “I wasn't just gonna leave him there.” Steve sits down on the couch, lifting Robin's legs momentarily before settling them on his own.

Dustin, wise beyond his years, just shrugs and accepts the fact that Steve “*acquired*” a cat through legally skeptical means. It's not like anyone is gonna sue over someone stealing a cat, they just might get mad and be petty over someone hording the cat for a while.

“Besides, I don’t even know if it was a stray or something, for all we know it could be a feral cat.”

Both Dustin and Robin shoot him identical looks of *sure Steve*, Robin’s the only one that says that aloud all dubious and wry.

Steve, feeling a touch defensive, replies back with “As long as no one goes around blabbing to everyone I suddenly have a cat I should be fine.” Angling a look at Dustin, knowing the party’s gonna know about Ginger within a few hours. Really, this kid knows loose lips sink ships, but then again they got the whole *friends don’t lie* pact going on. So Steve’s not gonna be surprised if he suddenly gets some visitors within a couple of days, but he’s trying to instill *some* sense of secrecy in the kid. It’s not like they’ll ask if Steve’s got a pet or even a cat recently, Dustin will just offer that up on a silver platter for the rest to then come and verify for themselves.

Eventually Dustin gets back on topic and starts rambling about his new obsession that leads into an update on Suzie and how she’s doing alongside an update on everyone in the party. Robin’s good at letting the kid talk himself in circles, content to listen and sometimes tune out. They tend to switch on and off, taking turns listening about what’s caught his interest today, it’s how no one goes insane cause man this kid can get real excited about shit and just be an endless stream of chatter. It’s good to encourage your kids, right? What’s especially helpful is Robin has a better perspective on how to treat a girl, because *they’re just like everyone else doofus*, which is true but like they also need to *feel* special and that’s *where the disconnect is happening Robin*.

They have pizza and Steve drives Dustin home because *it’s late and I know Claudia wants you home before 10 Dustin, stop arguing*. And Steve realizes he doesn’t have to head back to an empty house, Robin’ll be there till next week because her parents decided to take an extended anniversary. Steve drives with a smile on his face, an instance that’s been happening more as of late.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I don’t think I’m going mark Billy’s death as a main character death. We will see more children soon and

don't worry Nancy and Jonathan will make an appearance eventually.



## 8. Big Boy Pants

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve gets to see some kids. Robin has to deal with them. Ginger gets more people to play with him.

### Notes for the Chapter:

no real warnings this chapter

When Steve got back Robin had put away almost everything and swept up the spilled dry food into a neat little pile beside the designated food dish. All that cleaning he put off is now current Steve's problem that past Steve left, so he cleans up the food, wipes up some spilt water and washes the water bowl before refilling and leaving it. When he makes his into the bathroom to shower, he rinses out the tub cause *gross*. After the nice hot semi-relaxing shower, he brushes his teeth and gets into bed. He assumed Robin was already asleep but just as he lays down beside her, she turns to him and startles the absolute shit out of him- and he's seen a fucking *monster* burst *through* a wall.

“**Shit** Robin, almost gave me a fucking heart attack.” Clutching his chest with wide eyes he knows she could make out in the dim light his bedroom is drenched in because sleeping without lights is a big *no* for the both of them.

Attempting to smother her soft and tired laughter, she wheezes out “Jeez didn’t know you were such a scaredy-cat.”

“What do you want besides my soul cause holy shit I think I lost it.”

Robin shoves him a touch before turning on her side to face him.

“Just, what’s gonna happen when this summer ends? What’s gonna happen to everyone?”

And he knows what she really means. She’s asking him what his plan are without actually asking him, trying to take off any kind of pressure and the cagey feeling in he gets in his chest when he thinks of his future. He knows it won’t be bright, couldn’t get into a college and his parents don’t actually care if he lives and dies in this house just as long as everything is exactly how they like it and his dad can

boss him around all he wants. There was this feeling that he used to have, this drive that told him to get the fuck out of Indiana and never look back. It's still kinda there but there's an opposing stronger driving force keeping him here. It's like he's pulled in two different directions; one being if he leaves then he doesn't have to deal with all this supernatural bullshit and towering flesh monsters from nightmares and the other being if he stays he can protect the kids, which he honestly wasn't the best at but hey none of the shits have died on his watch yet.

He knows it's not just him that Robin's asking about either. He knows how badly she wants to be freed from this seemingly never-ending mind demon infested shithole of a town. He knows she wants to breathe easier without hiding as much of herself, wants to date and have love without being hounded by the possibility of the town ascending on her and torching everything she loves. Robin told him she applied for a couple out of state colleges and he's absolutely terrified of her leaving him. It's entirely selfish and makes his insides squirm in the worst ways because he doesn't want her to not succeed but for her to succeed and truly be happy she will leave and he will be left behind and when that happens it'll hurt worse than anything he's ever felt.

A hand gently touches his face "Hey, where'd ya go?"

"Mm, just thinkin" Robin's lookin at him like he's delicate and kinda needs the kid gloves but this time he really needs to let her vent. These past two days have been all about Steve and while he's grateful she's such a good friend she doesn't comment on how much of a mess he is, he knows she needs a sound board and a friend too.

"What college you plannin on going to?"

Robin blinks then settles into the topic with ease, give her something to direct her ample nervous energy to and she's not gonna spiral-brownie points for Steve being a good friend.

"I think I'm planning on going to Long Beach in California, it's the cheapest I got into and I've got a scholarship with band which *thank fuck*. It's far but it's not gonna cost an arm and a leg to be dorming. Fuck I'm so nervous and excited it's gonna be hell but at least it'll be a fun type of hell ya know?"

Steve doesn't really know but he nods along and hums and haws all the same, let's her speak and wind herself down from probably imagining the maps of how everyone's leaving. She's really gonna be gone though. He's not gonna see her every day, not gonna get her daily dose of cynicism, sarcasm, and friendship. He loves her so much, but his heart is hurting at how conflicted he is with wanting to be happy for her being so excited to leave but also saddened that he's being left behind. They will always have these days though, best enjoy it while he can cause in no time she'll be gone, and he'll be here till no one needs him and they all leave.

Ginger scurries a bit across the floor and Robin tells him that's normal and he'll probably see the cat doing it a bunch more now that it's eating more and has more energy. It takes his mind off the inevitable countdown of when she'll be gone and then he'll only get to see her on like *holidays* or when she has a lull in her schedule and can *squeeze him in* and then it *always* fades after that. He remembers how his mom talked about her high school acquaintances and how they slowly lost touch. He doesn't want that to happen to him and Robin, but it looks like he doesn't really have a say in that. She's going places and living her life and he's gonna be here, in Indiana where his parents don't believe he'll ever leave and don't care about him even really existing here either.

Ginger is jumping around and acts just like a sugar-hyped kid that's literally bouncing off the walls. He eventually tires himself out and crawls up the bed to sit between Steve and Robin's heads. Robin pets Ginger for a second then settles in to *really* sleep. Talking about leaving and everything she has to plan- since she's the first one of her family to go into a four-year university- must've really soothed her nerves.

Steve, for the life of him, can't get to sleep. He doesn't have a shift tomorrow so he knows it'll be ok if he doesn't actually fall asleep for more than a couple hours, but Robin will know and she will ask him about it because she'll feel guilty that she got some sleep and he didn't. He worries she might notice his clingy yet also sometimes distant behavior. He tends to cycle through two distinct moods because he needs to be ready for them to be apart for really long periods of time and also he wants to enjoy the dwindling days left he

has with her, hence the distant and clingy behavior.

He does eventually fall asleep at some point, though not before he thinks he sees the sun rising. When he wakes up disoriented and way later than he thought, he hears more than one voice downstairs. He starts to worry when he doesn't here yellin- nope never mind there it is. So the party is here then, or at least some of them. He doesn't know why they're yelling or what they're yelling at until he notices Robin is gone and so is Ginger. So they've met the cat by then. Huffing and looking at the time, Steve gets dressed and heads downstairs then into the kitchen beside his unusually loud living room.

"He named it *Ginger*?" That sounds like Max.

"Yeah! I told him it was lame and unoriginal, but he won't budge on the name and neither will Robin. I tried to get her to talk some sense into him but nothing." And that would be Dustin.

He knows there's a couple more kids who aren't as loud as them so he'll see know who's all here once he's had coffee. As he fixes himself a cup, the noise level drops some but there's still no inside voice being used.

Robin walks towards him with a faux annoyed look and says "You've been up there for a while."

Steve, not fully firing on all cylinders, only looks mildly amused at her front of having to deal with the kids. He knows she doesn't *love* dealing with kids but she doesn't *hate* these ones, he would even say she's rather fond of them.

"Did they just decide to be quiet and let me sleep longer?" Steve says, voice tinged with sleep and a hint playful.

Robin looking more smug than faux annoyed replies "More like I told them to keep quiet and couldn't be helped to keep track of their volume anymore."

Steve looks at her, letting his face show how grateful he is that she let him sleep in when these rambunctious pre-teens invaded the house and probably demanded to see Ginger.

"Thanks for letting me sleep in, but", with a smug look appearing on

his face Steve continues, “that’s your fault for answering the door.”

And with that he prepares himself for a second and then heads into living room where he sees Max, Dustin, Jane, and Mike.

Immediately they’re quiet for a second and then before any of the other shits can ask anything Jane asks him “How did you find him?”

Steve thinks for a second about censoring his story but ultimately decides that if they ask, he’ll tell them more. “Ginger ole boy was running around the quarry and I picked him up two days ago.” He hesitates to add, “Don’t think he has a home, so I have him at the moment.”

“I *told* you he *stole* a cat!” Dustin exclaims while Max and Mike look annoyed.

“Wait so you don’t know whose cat this is?” Max asks while playing with the makeshift toy.

Steve joyously replies “Nope. Then again if they were looking for Ginger, they would’ve put up signs by now right? He was pretty emaciated and had a cut on his side so obviously someone had left them for a while.”

“So you took someone’s cat.” Mike said unimpressed but also looking a little jealous of Max playing with Ginger.

“Not *take*, if someone puts up signs, I’ll give him back. He’s here for safe keeping.” Steve says and everyone in the room understands the implications of just *what* can be lurking in the woods despite knowing Jane could fuck up anything crawling through the portal.

“Why Ginger?” Max asks with a judgmental face.

“Cause he’s a ginger.” Steve replies, trying to keep them from questioning about the name more. He heard Max mutinously mutter “better never call me a ginger.”

Jane asks for a turn with playing with the toy and Max lets her with minimal reluctance.

Dustin raids his kitchen and brings out chips and a couple of soda cans.

*Ugh*, he’s gonna have to clean up all the crumbs they leave

everywhere.

The cat's cleaner than those shits are when he eats.

Robin walks back in from her refreshing 5 minute pre-teen free break.

"So I'm guessing you all have nothing better to do on a Saturday than to bother Steve about his cat?" She asked dryly.

All the kids turn to her looking betrayed with Dustin actually saying "Hey!"

"We were *worried* about Steve losing it since he randomly decided to *steal* a cat!" Dustin indignantly says while pointing accusingly at Steve and Ginger.

"We're gonna go to Will's in a bit anyways. Let Steve and Robin spend more time together." Mike haughtily says.

Steve feels like he has an out of body experience when Mike mentions Will. He hasn't seen that kid much at all, much less than Jane and Jane's not even supposed to be *seen* out very often if ever. Maybe it's because of Nancy and Jonathan and all their drama, might make the kid uncomfortable. That shouldn't affect how often Will spends time with his friends. Many of the kids have been coming over for the pool but it's lost some of its sheen with the reminder of Billy. Max never got in the pool after the **mall** and he doesn't think she will this summer and maybe not till next year.

He'll need to talk to Will and make sure he feels welcome to come over. Oh *ugh*, he might even need to talk to Nancy and Jonathan, and he doesn't think he can have Robin there. There goes his joy.

Steve tries to put on a semi believable happy face and "I might tag along with you all when you head over there."

The look of sheer confusion then alarm that passes over all the kids and even Robin's faces amuses Steve to no end.

### Notes for the Chapter:

um oops, this chapter is long bc I got lazy and didn't post for a while. Also constructive criticism is 100% great and appreciated!!

## 9. Anticipation

### Summary for the Chapter:

Kids + Steve&Robin + cat = a mess and fun with a flare of drama.

Sometimes, Steve thinks, he doesn't always think things through. Like right now, as in this moment now because while the disbelief and sheer panic crosses everyone's faces almost in sync is absolutely hilarious, it's also a bit... sad? Like he knows everyone cares, or well at least they *say* they do, but he didn't completely believe till *now* .

He knows the Wheeler shit, ugh *fine* Robin , *Michael* is more worried about the amount of strain and awkwardness it would put on the Byers as well as their guests, but the genuine panic and almost sad or maybe pitying look he gets when he suggests to go over there is well... both reaffirming and still funny- he never knew the kid's face could contort like *that* .

So when faced with a situation that he got himself into by opening his big mouth before his brain could fully process what in the hell he could get himself into, he laughs. He laughs so hard he almost pisses himself and might've accidentally led the gaggle of kids, cat, and Robin to believe he wasn't serious.

He completely is.

He wants Will to know he's allowed over here and doesn't need to sit out just because of relationship shit between *Nancy, Jonathan, and himself* .

While he's laughing hard, Dustin seems to shake the shock out of his dropped open mouth and turns to Robin with a look of blame deigns to ask Robin "So you let him lose it?"

And Robin, the ever-quick-witted banterer swiftly replies, "He never had it to begin with."

And hm, she's not *wrong* , but like *ouch* .

His soft rebuke of "hey" is over shrouded by *Michael's* stern -which *weird* , the only emotions he's shown to have are anger, smugness,

and lovey-dovey only when Jane's around- and surprisingly level volume "No."

Steve doesn't really know how to feel when a *child* tells him no, let alone because Steve can just easily drive there and Wheeler wouldn't be able to do jack shit about it. It's weird because it wasn't said with the smugness and antagonistic way the kid usually acts, it was said like an adult would when refusing to let a kid do something. He's not the kid here, so this whole weirdness and freaky calm Michael has got going on needs to stop now.

Steve, trying to reign in his full bellies laughs and wiping the tears from his eyes, decides to think for a second before opening his gab.

Those few precious seconds don't help much.

Steve tried to begin his reasoning with a "So listen-" only to be interrupted by Dustin's cry of dismay "What? No! You're not going."

And this is where Steve decides he's going to have to keep the shits quiet while he explains his thoughts because none of them have faith in his higher cognitive abilities.

"Listen to the adult when they're speaking." To which everyone simultaneously rolls their eyes, huh betrayal in the smallest of gestures. Steve, unwilling to take that sass sitting down, barreled on and said "Hey, I'm an adult. I'm 18 and can drive, unlike most of you. Now shut up and listen. Did any of you ever notice Will is *never* here? Even when almost everyone is here and it's all planned out Will is nowhere to be found? And the few times he came over he stayed as far away as possible from me?"

Steve can see their faces change as he talks, he sees how the Wheeler shit looks the guiltiest. He can also see when the kid kinda snarks at the staying away from Steve bit yet still manages it look sad about everything else. If this is what having younger siblings is like, then Steve's glad his mom didn't have more kids.

Steve lets them digest that for a second or two before plunging on, "Don't start bothering him 'bout it. I'll see if I can talk to him a-"

Surprisingly, or well maybe not, Dustin interrupts him with a "Wait don't! He might feel cornered. Wouldn't it be better if we just talked to him instead?"



And while Dustin's reasoning is sound, those kids don't really have a subtle bone in their body and might make worse, like making Will think he's not welcome at all. Steve doesn't really want to get involved with all of that, but well Will's a nice and quiet kid -as far as he can tell- so he deserves to hang out with his friends and not feel extremely awkward about what happened with all the *Nancy-Jonathan* guilt. It's not like Steve blames him for what happened, Nancy and Jonathan make their own choices just like Steve made his.

"If you think you won't screw it up, sure go ahead." Steve says, relaxing more fully into the couch next to Robin. Ginger decides he's had enough attention from the rowdy teens and saunters off somewhere else in the house. *Great*, Steve thinks, he's gonna have to find him and might even need Robin for the search party.

Speaking of parties, the other kids have been quiet throughout this whole ordeal. They look kinda guilty and maybe a bit sad, like they only just realized how often they've seen Will this summer. Man, they've grown up quicker than most people do. It took Steve till well *now* to worry a lot about someone else's feelings and well being. It's not like he completely disregarded it before, it's just that it wasn't as important as his own comfort.

Dustin took Steve's words as a challenge and said with an slight air of confidence and light enthusiasm "Yeah, we got this, right guys?" Max just rolls her eyes but let's out a huff of a sure and Jane solemnly nods along. Michael nods but in an absent-minded way, kid still has that look of contemplation, maybe he's bothered Steve noticed something he didn't and Steve's not even *close* to Will as Michael were supposed to be.

"So I'm not tagging along with you shits? Or what's the deal here? Cause I don't want yelling and all those dropped jaws catching flies at the Byers's house."

Robin looks at Steve, *really* looks at him like she's staring at his thoughts or at least trying to parse out just why would Steve even want to torture himself with that. Her analyzing stare and with a wry twist of her lips that bends into a mischievous smile she says "If you go, I'm coming with you. I want to see all of this go down."

Uh what did she think was gonna happen? Not the end of the world

type shit, just some angsts teenager/young adult mess that might get sorted just a bit more. She probably just wants to tease Steve and maybe support him for having to deal with Nancy and Jonathan being *Nancy-and-Jonathan*.

“Ya know, now that I think of it, I never officially met Joyce. Steve can introduce me while you go do stuff kids do.” Robin said.

Oh boy did she stoke a fire. Those kids looked irritated at being called kids and Steve *knows* she knows better them to call them that while Dustin *and* Michael are there. Those two could talk paint off a house, and knowing Dustin, he would want to scientifically see if that’s possible.

Wait, did Robin just sacrifice herself to the teenage wolves? Aw, she *does* care, how sweet. Now they’ll be busy arguing about not being kids till they move onto something else and kinda forget about Steve’s announcement. She’s given him a way to go or not without feeling obligated, cool.

Steve lets her be eaten alive for a minute so he can search for Ginger and see where he decided to hide from all the excitement and noise. He heads in the kitchen, then to the dinning room and spots a fluff under a chair in the afternoon light. Just as Steve is about to approach and try and corral Ginger from under the chair, Jane walks into the room.

“Steve?” she asks in a smaller voice than he’s heard before. Turning around but staying near enough to hear if Ginger tries to run off somewhere else Steve addresses her with a “Yup?” She has on this soft but serious and sad look when she starts, “Friends don’t lie. Am I a bad friend for not noticing Will?”

Steve is gobsmacked, because first of all she’s feeling guilty for something she couldn’t really control, didn’t know about, and had a bunch of other issues going on what with Hopper still recovering and her powers seemingly gone and second of all Michael didn’t follow her here.

“You’re not a bad friend.” Steve trails off not knowing what else to say.

“But I didn’t notice-”

Steve cuts her off “It wasn’t your job to notice. You have a lot going on right now and it’s ok if you miss a couple of things going on with everyone else. You’re not always gonna see what’s going on. It’s good that you guys have a lot of friends, so no one ever gets feeling left out.” Steve takes a breath before plunging on, “Don’t feel guilt, maybe just include ‘im more?” Steve’s really not qualified to be giving any kind of advice, especially with friends because while he argued he was an adult a bit ago, he doesn’t really have a good relationship with his friends either.

“Okay.” She nods and then asks, “Why do they not want you to go to our house?” and *aw shit* now he’s gotta explain some stuff to her, *fuck*. This is so not what he thought today was gonna be like.

“Well-” Steve starts only to thankfully get interrupted by Max walking in and yelling “Found ‘em! Found Ginger too!” Steve has never been more thankful for the loud kids that invaded the house.

To avoid answering Jane’s question, Steve followed Max back into the living room where the chips and soda cans have disappeared, likely thrown in the trash or put away to keep Robin from heckling the kids more. She has a good way of either goading or guiltting someone into doing things for her- or in this particular case for Steve.

"Since everything is packed up I'm going to guess you all are wanting a ride to Byers?" And Steve gets a few hopeful faces which he fully expected even despite their panic and worry over him actually *entering* the house and *staying*.

Dustin asks, well more like *tells* Steve but it still was sorta suggestion so it counts, “We can leave the bikes outback.” Steve doesn’t think his parents would look outside and they shouldn’t be dropping by anytime soon so there’s no worry over that. Some of the kids grumble at having to move the bikes but they all go out and move them in a stack. Ginger sneaks out and dashes towards the door the kids leave open. Steve intercepts him and takes him out back to roam for a bit and is mindful of the kids bringing their bikes there.

Once they’ve got all the bikes in the back and Steve corals Ginger

back in the house, they all try to pile into the car. Both Robin and Steve watch the kids struggle for a moment. Steve decides to just put them out of their misery and tells the kids “One of you needs to sit on another’s lap and then we can go.”

They look at Steve for a moment and then Max tells Jane “You can sit on mine, it’s fine.” And that solves that, or well it *mostly* solves it. Seems like *someone* is rather unhappy in that arrangement but he can shut up and just not be defiant and sulky at every other turn.

“Are you done?” Steve asks with more than a hint of a laugh in his voice looking back at the shit through his rearview mirror.

Jane offers a smile and a thumbs up while Max just tells Steve to “Just drive already.”

Dustin answers with a touch annoyed “Yes, can we go?” Michael just grumbles knowing that if he provokes Steve they wouldn’t get anywhere.

They definitely are shits, but still they’re *his* shits sorta. And he’s allowed to have his favorites, right? Robin rolls her eyes at their combined antics, but she’s smiling that small smile she tries to hide when she’s pleased but doesn’t want Steve to get smug.

Starting the car and shoving in his favorite tape, Steve announces, “Alright, to the Byers’s we go.”

## Notes for the Chapter:

Steve didn't really have the best relationship with Mike and bc Steve is petty, he will call him Michael just to bother him. I would like to think the Byers would be helping Jane learn and would know more sentences. I'm going to still keep her vocabulary low because there's a lot to learn when someone keeps you in a lab and doesn't let you interact with anyone nor learn in a normal setting. I also made Mike more sassy and like disrespectful bc I think he's a bit bitter and jaded with everything that happened and he is a teen. I'd like to think the characters haven't gone too OOC but \\_( ͡ʁ )\_/ . Also yup Mike was the annoyed sulky one.

## 10. Evening Turmoil

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve + Byers' house, how weird could it get? Probably not much since the kids and Robin are a great buffer.

### Notes for the Chapter:

mentions of child neglect, very minor but still there towards the end.

It's not too early, more like midday and Steve knows there's a likely chance Jonathan and Nancy'll be there. Joyce *might* be working *maybe* Jonathan too, however since Hopper and Joyce were able to argue for money for his extensive injuries caused by demon dogs, the consequent extensive hospital stay, and his numerous medications money isn't too tight. They didn't get a whole bunch more because Jane was *not* a toy *nor* something to sell and her powers (not that anyone let the government know her powers had waned and maybe disappeared) were *not* something to be played with.

Steve's already slightly regretting cramming the noisy shit birds- as Robin likes to call them- in the back. They were slightly quiet until Dustin decided to sing along and Michael thought it was a good idea to critique his performance. This of course lead to everyone else singing, more like yelling at the top of their lungs than singing, passive aggressively at him. Even Jane sang at him, though she didn't know most of the words since Max had taken to showing her music and forming her tastes more than Hopper had. Steve *apparently* didn't have the best taste in music but it was "not entirely awful Steve" which was about as much of approval from Max he was gonna get so he let it rest.

Robin, despite trying to play down the amount of fun she was having around the rambunctious kids, still smiled and crooned along to what Steve's cassette had. She had her own in the car's glove box, one she made and left so whenever they hung out she could chill. She wasn't

a *huge* music snob but she was a bit of one.

Feeling slightly panicked and only a touch, well maybe more than a touch, sick Steve drove up to the Byers's house. Parking and walking up to the door was anticlimactic and sorta helped soothe his nerves, that and Robin was right there letting him clutch her arm like a lifeline.

The kids had all burst from the car once he'd parked and ran up ahead to ring the doorbell. Will answered, looking more confused than tired which was an improvement if Steve did say so himself. "Did we have plans?" Will asked sounding like he'd been napping and judging by all the sleep wrinkles he'd most likely been sleeping or at least took a light doze for a bit.

Dustin, never one to acknowledge personal space, stepped right up and clapped Will on the shoulder bringing him a bit closer and said "Nope, doesn't mean we can't stop by once in a while. Stop blocking the door and let us in already."

Will, confused but looking a bit touched and happy opened the door more for the kids to file in.

He paused when he caught sight of Steve and Robin standing a bit further back but stepping forward to enter the house. Robin took the reins on asking Will "where's Joyce? Never got to officially meet her, or Hopper for that matter." Will looking more baffled than scared let them in and shut the door behind them.

The kids were coalescing in front of the tv where Will was about to head to when Robin asked where to get water. When Steve shot her a questioning look she whispered under her breathe "so he won't feel cornered if you just ask to talk to him. He won't be expecting it though so don't be a goof."

Steve was so impressed by her quick thinking he almost missed the chance to follow them into the kitchen.

They had gotten a new fridge and a tv with the hush money Hopper and Joyce argued for. They might've even had some in savings for when Jonathan lugs off to college. Steve remembers the fraught and

tense negotiations before the Byers and Hopper got some to help to deal with everything both physically and mentally.

Hopper had physical therapy and Jane had monthly sessions to talk about what happened to her and help her acclimate more to a normal life than she had been before. Will got monthly sessions to talk about his experiences too, though those didn't seem to help him much what with his still haunted look and tired eyes.

Steve takes a breathe and turns to Will with a more serious look on his face, nothing too grim but something that'll convey to Will he isn't joking.

Jerking his head towards the living room where the teens were huddled to watch and argue over the tv, "The squirts have been bogarting my pool for the past couple a weeks, 'bout time we get someone who *actually* has manners over."

Robin elbowed Steve and gave the "take this more serious" look while Will looked at him with a confused upturn in his brow.

"Listen kid," Steve started in, knowing Will would only slightly object to the term, "you can come over anytime with them. You don't need a formal invitation. I gotta say, I'm feeling neglected as the supposed babysitter of your whole party thing."

Toning down the slightly dramatic tone he had, he looked Will in the eyes and said sincerely, "Nancy and Jonathan," which made Will squirm a bit and look away so Steve pushes valiantly on, "made their own choices, nothing on you. You're allowed to come over, especially since I know you're the least likely to break something."

Knowing it might not be enough, Steve tacked on, "They probably miss seeing as you've appeared as often as the full moon." Which wasn't supposed to seem as cryptic when he said it and sounded pretty stupid, but caused a bit of a laugh and both Will and Robin gave him that patent "you're a goof, Steve Harrington" smile.

Robin, probably trying to clear the atmosphere of all seriousness, spoke up, "So where's Joyce and Hopper? I really never got to meet them, Steve never thought to introduce me."

Steve snarks quietly under his breathe, quietly enough hopefully no one else should really hear, "We were too busy trying *to live*, I'm sorry there was no red carpet."

"They're out for Hopper's physical therapy, actually they should be back soon." Will said.

Robin, content with waiting, titled her head and looked back to the living room with kids before walking back towards them herself with Will and Steve trailing behind. Dustin caught Steve gaze for a moment and Steve smiled back as reassuringly as he could, he even gave a tiny thumbs up that Michael and Max caught tail end of.

That's when Steve heard the door down the hall open and he knew it wasn't Jonathan that came out, the steps were too light and the voice that called out "Will, who's all here?" was all too feminine and all too familiar.

While full well knowing it was a *possibility* to run into Nancy and Jonathan, Steve slightly panicked at the thought of *actually* having to confront with dealing with Nancy and Jonathan. Luckily Robin was there and wouldn't let him melt into a frenzy. She gripped his hand and looked him the eye, surprisingly it settled him enough to copy her larger breath in and out. He felt more grounded and while he wasn't ready, he was as ready as he was gonna get.

Of course he knew the kids were perceptive and at least a few would've looked his way when Nancy called, but he wasn't expecting all eyes to be on him. It did mollify him a bit to see Michael and Max look away towards the tv as soon as he spied their eyes, but Dustin, Will, and Jane we're still eyeing him albeit each with a different intent.

Will seemed hesitant and looked away to reply back to Nancy while Jane looked on in curiosity and slight scrutiny before Michael tried to call her attention to the tv. Dustin just looked a bit worried for Steve and maybe chagrined enough to wrongfully stand up for Steve's



honor and past hurt feelings.

Eyes widened in surprise and jaw slightly dropped when spotting Steve after looking at the gaggle of kids gathered in the living room, Nancy said “Oh. Uh, didn’t know there’d be so many today.” She sheepishly and maybe even a little befuddled trailed on, “Well, uh, everyone knows where everything is, so um I’ll just...” and trailed off while jerkily pointing to what Steve assumes must be Jonathan’s room before turning around and almost running right back in and shutting the door.

Steve swore he heard Jonathan start to say something but he could’ve been wrong.

“Well that was something.” Robin said into Steve’s ear with amusement laced in her tone.

Trust Robin to not poke the sleeping bear. Will only looked minimally uncomfortable and Dustin surprisingly kept his mouth shut, so it wasn’t all bad. The house didn’t cave in on Steve either so he could count that as a win for the time being.

Steve could still feel Max’s stare at the side of his face when he decided maybe he over stayed his welcome. He already accomplished what he set out to do, what he accidentally motivated the kids to try and rectify. Maybe he should leave? As if sensing his thoughts, or maybe reading the increasingly uncomfortable faces Steve must’ve been making, Robin asked Will again, “So when do Joyce and Hopper get back?”.

Her question only cut half the awkward tension floating in the room and surrounding Steve, but it gave something for Will to latch onto which he did with gusto.

“They should be back any minute now. His physical therapy sessions have been getting longer but not by much yet.”

So not much longer would Steve be stuck here in this awkward situation. Joyce makes everything worth it and Hopper doesn’t hurt

anything, well except for creepy scientists and horrific creatures of the night.

Just a waiting game, Steve's played enough of those with his parents and wishing for them to show up that he can confidently say he would win. He could probably get an A in waiting, but Steve doesn't think that's something to mention to Robin, she might get that look in her eye and start to treat him with kiddie gloves and *guh* that's not fun.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

um holy fuck school and work are taking turns kicking my ass. Don't have covid myself but my work has been shut down 3 times now for someone else having it, my only hope is everyone else is ok. stay safe and hopefully I can update sooner than 3 months.

## 11. Turmoil or is that just my stomach?

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve, in all his wisdom, decides to try and talk, now whether or not that talk actually resolves anything is more dependent on everyone than juts himself.

### Notes for the Chapter:

warning: hinting at and mentions (but not graphic descriptions) of child abuse and neglect

There are moments in his life where he knew, *just knew*, things were going to *shit* and nothing could stop it.

At first he fought, fought so hard tooth and nail and all he got was his bloodied face, slightly worse vision, cheated on, broken up with, and... and a pool he can't look at, so he doesn't let it happen doesn't just roll over but so much as roll with the punches. If he can't go up the waterfall he's hurtling down then he might try and aim away from the jagged rocks.

So here he is, in the Byers' house, nodding to Nancy in the split second she saw him and possibly having to talk to her in the kitchen when she gets back from Jonathan's room where she most likely ran, well *maybe not* ran but at least walked *very very fast*, off to. Now he knows that they might both come out together and... he did not think this through at all but that happens and he's got Robin, Robin'll keep him alive, she's done well so far.

Robin is giving him serious concerning looks and, though they're terribly trying to hide it, most of the kids are too, including *Will*. Steve knows he's probably got a bit of a panicked and pinched look stretched on his face, but he's got to suck it up, if not for himself then for the kids.

For the kids.

Those shits better be thankful.

He had thrown looks at all the eyes staring at him, ever so careful to avoid Robins assessing gaze. One by one the kids started to tune back into the tv and pay less attention to him which is great, until both Nancy and Jonathan walk into the living room and breaks whatever semblance of peace they had momentarily regained.

All the air sorta gets sucked out and there's this weird limbo Steve feels keenly, like everyone is holding their breath and daring the other to make a move first. He knows he has the kids, at least most, on his side of the *metaphorical-and-maybe-divorce-ish-camp* so Nancy and Jonathan really only have a couple in theirs, so in the end he's got more support he'll be fine, *right* ?

Robin doesn't seem phased but judging by the incremental curl of her lip closer to disgust than a smile and momentary sharpening of her gaze before she returns to this stony disinterested look tells quite a different story.

She rearing up for a fight, or at least ready to defend Steve, which *hey* is why Robin is so amazing in the first place. She might have most fooled with her absently kind and aloof look, but Max knows, she's seen it in action at the video store when a customer was late and returned a damaged vcr.

That customer was lucky to escape with the skin on their back.

Robin is vicious when she wants to and needs to be, and Steve might need to make sure she doesn't claw someone's eye out.

Nancy's eyes stray to Steve before before cutting to the ground and minutely rolling her shoulders back while breathing deeply, she's steeling herself Steve thinks idly, before facing him with Jonathan's hand in her own.

He was so busy with Nancy, Steve didn't even see whatever Jonathan must've done. Steve just knows he did *something* because Robin's hand tightens around his before incrementally loosening.

"Steve" ,Nancy haltingly says, tripped up by not knowing who Robin is, "and a friend?" she ends blushing a touch.

"Robin" Robin replies coolly.

*And this is off to a great start, great just what Steve needs.*

Steve cuts in before anything else can be said, "I was here to talk to Will."

At least this won't cause any fights.

"What for?" Jonathan asks quickly but not quite sharply.

Right.

The kid has therapy for a reason. Now he's got to reassure Jonathan that nothing is wrong, well nothing *more* is wrong with Will.

Steve try's to downplay the seriousness of it all and replies "Just thought he could use time at the pool, haven't seen 'im lately." And to maybe save face at least a little Steve tacks on with a *what can you do* shrug of his shoulders, "Dustin sure hasn't either."

It seems both Jonathan and Nancy don't know what to say, judging by the looks of confusion and maybe a bit thoughtfulness clouding their expressions.

Wait.

Did Jonathan think Steve was trying to threaten Will?

*He's a kid.* Steve might've been, well maybe still is but at least not as much of, a jerk but he didn't try and bodily harm *little kids*. What kind of asshole could do...

Well ok, so he knows at least one, judging by what his parents and Tommy's and Carol's parents had said about Lonnie, but did his dad really have much room to talk?

Then Jonathan pipes up awkwardly, steam taken out of his panicked and half raised sails, "Uh thanks."

Seems everyone, barring Robin, underestimated Steve a little, which *rude*. He fought with everyone *thank you very much*. He doesn't have to be related to the kids to care for them. If anything, he's seen how

blood relation has nothing to do with saving some or caring for someone.

Huh, maybe he really should talk to Robin more.

Nancy doesn't look as hardened and Jonathan just kind of looks uncomfortable but more like when he was in high school rather than preparing to fight for his brother's honor or something. It's interesting how they didn't think this was about their relationship and the things that happened with Steve, so maybe they are giving him a bit more credit but it still stings a bit.

Steve decides something, something that may be a bit stupid and more than a hell of a lot gutsy, he jerks his head towards the dinning room, opposite to the living room so as to have an appearance of privacy and meanders over there with Robin hot on his heels.

"Steve" she hisses a whisper, lower than the volume of the tv and hopefully not visible to the kids, "what. the. fuck."

He just kinda shrugs but looks her dead in the eyes and says "I'm tired of this and I think I'm not the only one too." and hopes it's a reasonable enough explanation that Robin leaves it.

And to his surprise, she does, maybe she was done with the tension too. That's gotta be the only reason she'd allow them to talk alone, otherwise she would keep the guard dog act up and sick the kids on them.

Steve stands straight with Robin at his side and waits for Nancy and Jonathan to go over to them.

It's all kinds of awkward and uncomfortableness but hey that's life and this has gotta resolve at least slightly sometime, might as well be now.

Jonathan doesn't seem to know what to do with his hands and keeps tucking them in pockets making his shoulders tense up only to later roll them back down and try to remain relaxed. Nancy stands stock still, meeting everyone's eyes and not being afraid but also coiled tightly. Robin is relaxed in the ways jaguars are when they're on the prowl and Steve is just horribly awkward and irrevocable exhausted.

"Let's get this elephant in the room out of the way" Steve begins bravely, "I don't care that you're dating." Steve pauses for a second, trying to keep from tripping this invisible sensor that could set everyone off. "It hurts that I wasn't made aware that I wasn't dating anyone anymore until I heard an announcement. And-"

Nancy looks both aggrieved and guilty as she tries to interrupt only to be cut off tersely and quietly by Robin calming saying "You had your chance to explain, let him talk."

Steve gives a small private smile of thanks to Robin and breathes deeply before continuing "And it could have been obvious I guess but something official would've been nice. It uh, it didn't feel nice to have to find out by the kids and some asshole what happened. I uh, I know I had the reputation of a player but I, I never cheated on anyone." Steve realizes he's never out loud admitted those rumors were just that, rumors started from bored kids who wanted to build up some rich kid that was already on a pedestal. "So um I'm ok with you two dating", Steve's gazes flickers between the two, "just how it started isn't exactly uh great for me."

Steve rubs his neck, gaze trained on the floor, "So uh yeah, that's that, but um that's not why I'm here." Steve steels himself and looks Jonathan in the eye, "I don't think Will wants to come over because he feels awkward being around me, but I uh sorta set him straight on that. " Shrugging his shoulders Steve continues "It's summer and this year, or well these past two years have been shit for him so if he wants to spend time with his friends then he's more than welcome to. And uh, yeah that's it."

Jonathan looks just the tiniest bit surprised while Nancy is trying to hide her shock but Steve has some insider knowledge and can read the signs, then again he didn't think anything was amiss so maybe he can't read her as well as he's thought he could.

Robin silently appraises him to then look to Nancy and Jonathan as if she's saying *what's your next move?*

Jonathan looks to Nancy before responding "I didn't even know he was getting invited, he's become a bit more private now with everything. I'll uh let him know. And, for what it's worth, it wasn't

planned." Jonathan finished quietly looking down at his shoes before looking at Steve. Nancy looks abashed but stands more tall almost shielding Jonathan and softly adds "I just, I ne-" she sighs, " I want you to know I never set out to hurt you. It just happened, everything spiraled out of control and just... just nothing made sense and, and it just happened."

Steve just sorta grimaces and turns away from her earnest face and says "ok."

Robin looks between everyone and at Steve before she says "I think everyone's said what they needed to." The heavily implied for now silent but obvious. "So um why don't we let the kids be kids and uh wait for Hopper and Joyce. I really wasn't lying when I said I haven't officially met them yet."

Nancy softens a bit, replying "That sounds like a plan."

Steve and Robin watch Nancy and Jonathan leave first, letting them crawl into the lions den so to speak. The kids will have totally tried to listen on, they even kept the tv on for a more sure cover. Robin already had to deal with the brunt of the kids scrutiny once today, she wasn't about to let them get to her again, so they waited a bit before walking into the living room.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm trying to go back to how I used to write instead of the blocky text. The breaks weren't quite right for my writing so I'm hoping this reads more smoothly with better pacing. Next up Joyce and Hopper!!



## 12. Joyce is best

### Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Hopper get back. Robin meets Joyce and Steve talks a bit more with Joyce.

### Notes for the Chapter:

mentions/hints of child abuse

Steve was right, and *man* is he enjoying being right, about the shits just waiting to ambush whoever came out of the door. Steve doesn't offer any help nor does Robin when they see Mike and Will doggedly trail after Nancy and Jonathan whispering furiously. Well more like Mike and Nancy whispering furiously while Will and Jonathan walk on.

At least he doesn't have to deal with all of that.

Dustin is trying with an astronomical amount of determination to get Steve alone so that he can find out what happened and then promptly spill to the party, cause *come on* that kid can't keep a secret except for when it's a *demon slug* that later almost ate his and his friends' faces off.

Actually the party may have banned Dustin from keeping secrets for *that very reason*.

He'll just have to wait like the rest of the shits are for when Will and Mike come out to discretely- *yeah discretely Steve's ass-* tell them everything of what Steve said.

Out of everything, Steve hopes Will won't be too embarrassed for the trouble. He knows personally that at that age you start keeping secrets despite all the pacts and friendships made, despite the vulnerabilities, somethings just aren't said or they *can't* be.

Even with Dustin bugging him, the day goes on rather monotonously, though there is an ever so slight tension building in the kids displayed by their need to keep moving and fidgeting awaiting the

boys return.

They haven't come back for about an hour and the music in Jonathan's room has been fairly loud, loud enough to afford privacy.

They haven't come out when the sound of a car approaches the house.

They haven't come out when the car parks outside and footsteps approach the door.

They haven't come out when everyone hears the keys jangle and the lock begins to turn.

They come out once the lock turns and Joyce's tired but pleasant face pops through the door followed by a fatigued Hopper.

Will warmly greets his mom and nods to Hopper while Mike smiles at Joyce and ambles on talking quietly to Will.

Hopper seems to be taking in the amount of people in the living room and looks increasingly exasperated and tired. He walks with great care, Joyce supporting him as they walk towards her room.

Joyce comes into the living room and quietly says "They made him do a lot more today so we're just going to take it easy tonight ok? No being too loud," she inclines her head towards her room, "you know how grumpy our resident manly man gets. Now who's staying here for dinner?"

Steve sorta panics and looks to Robin who answers him with a small and subtle shake of her head.

Alrighty then, it's been decided.

Then when he's just about to answer for them Joyce warmly smiles and reaches a hand out for Robin says "You're a new face, how'd you get roped in with these kids?"

Steve feels her gaze softly settle on him for a moment before moving on.

Robin replies "Craziness follows me, I can't escape so might as well embrace it." finishing with a shrug.

Joyce just smiles and lightly laughs.

Steve can tell Robin already likes her and it may be mutual.

Joyce heads into the kitchen and Steve feels compelled to follow her. He knows that while she seems rather unhostile, yet he's said and done some shitty things to Jonathan and Nancy to warrant otherwise. She regards him carefully, not outright hostile but there may be an underlying current of scrutiny in her gaze that he seemingly feels acutely.

"Hi Mrs. Byers," Steve begins, feeling a little out of place, "I, um, Robin and I aren't gonna stay too long and the shi- kids needs a ride back so uh there won't be maybe more than Michael staying behind, that is if Mrs. Wheeler lets him." Steve trails off, hearing *rambling isn't a sign of being brought up in a proper household* in his mother's voice mockingly in his head.

Joyce turns fully to look at Steve head on and he feels like everyone one of his mistakes is staring back at him with no remorse but also no hatred. She looks at him but also through him.

"Steve Harrington," she starts with no disgust yet he notices the warmth Robin's name got is absent. "You're going to take those kids," she nods her head towards the living room, "home?"

Steve realizes in this moment he's only ever been known to her as someone who was an asshole to Jonathan and *that Harrington's* kid. People talk a shit ton on first impressions, his are always shit and that's despite all his prim and proper training his parents drilled into his skull.

Rubbing his neck and feeling a bit squirmy Steve replies, "Yeah, brought them all here might as well make sure they go back together. Better than making a bunch of drives."

He can see Joyce squint her eyes just the tiniest bit before she absent mindedly smiles. She starts gather things and rinsing stuff off to prepare dinner.

Just as Steve is about to leave she calls out, "Steve?"

He looks back, turning from just about reaching the doorway.

"Thank you for bringing them. I think Will needed this."

The way she says it isn't quite a *congrats you're on my good side* but its a start and that's more than he's been given in a long time.

He nods, sorta shrugs, and starts walking back to the kids to break the news they're being evicted soon.

The praise for being a good babysitter isn't exactly normal for him what with having appointed himself one within the past two years. Tell him he looks good or call him dumb and he knows what to do since that's all people really ever say about him.

When he breaks the news that everyone should be saying goodbyes so Steve can start taking the shits home all of them groan, Max even rolls her eyes.

Dramatic reactions aside they amicably get herded into the car pretty quick.

Too quick if he has anything to say about it.

Just as he turns on the engine and starts driving Dustin starts into him, *again*.

It seems Nancy and Jonathan were a bit more tight lipped about everything than Steve would've thought, maybe to spare Will. That doesn't Steve will be spilling the real conversation.

Dustin, annoyed by the redirections he was getting decided to be forthright and ask, "So was it about them dating? Are you mad?"

As if Steve would ever talk to the shits about his feelings, even *without* Michael being in the car. Robin is weirdly silent, deferring to what Steve only wants them to know.

Gritting his teeth Steve answers tersely, "No, as I've said probably a thousand times, it was not about them dating. Dustin if you ask one more time I will make you walk the rest of the way home."

Dustin puts his hands up in surrender, but that wouldn't deter Max. She seems to care less, but that's a blessing as of now.

Max is dropped off three houses before hers so the stepdad won't see Steve toting her around.

Dustin is dropped off at his house and both Steve and Robin are invited inside for a bit which he totally takes up because the Henderson's cookies are a *gift* to the humankind.

His day started off weird and the middle was definitely shit but tonight he gets to go to sleep knowing Robin is there and they can help each other.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I think Joyce interacted a touch more with Steve but like realistically she would only mainly know from her kids and from people she knew in high school and grew up with. I feel like she can judge but waits. I love her character so much. Also it's only been 3 days in this fic so far fucking hell.

## 13. Bright and Early

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve talks to Carol and Tommy and it wasn't the worst thing he's ever done. Huh

### Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions/implications of: panic and survivors guilt,

The next day and the day after that ran in the same motion Steve's been trying to settle into all summer after, well *after* all of it. Robin stayed with Steve and they got up for work, played with Ginger, dealt with minimal demands from the shits, the usual.

Like all good things, it had to end.

Robin had to go back to her house else the neighborhood decide her "*purity was tarnished*". Which sounded like complete bullshit since if anyone knew Robin they'd know she's all sharp edges and take no shit, but "*No Steve*". She literally told my mom where I was last time and I'd rather not have the pregnancy speech *again*".

So that was that.

These days gossip seems to have traveled faster than light despite... *despite* all things that have happened. Seems like people will always have time to talk about someone else rather than focus on themselves. Steve's just gotta breathe through it all for another couple of years, then he'll run.

Steve had almost forgotten about Tommy and Carol, but Robin had told him the day of to write it down and stick it by his phone so he wouldn't forget. He annoys her by being forgetful sometimes, but hey at least he's never forgotten anything when it's *life and death*, which tends happens more often than it should.

Besides, he's gotten hit in the head a load of times, it's bound to knock *something* loose.

Despite his original nervousness and opposition to calling Tommy

and Carol, it sounds less unpleasant than it was confronting Jonathan and by extension Nancy too.

There's some dread, but not enough to stop him from reaching for the phone and dialing. He knows that even though Tommy's a right asshole and really doesn't quite deserve his forgiveness, there's a string that ties all three of them together.

Carol doesn't get off scot-free, sure she might not have been as much of an ass as Tommy but she still needs to answer for some things she did. Steve hasn't completely forgiven her for letting Tommy be vicious while she spread malicious rumors.

Him, Carol, and Steve were the top dogs of the school out of necessity by parental circumstance and a fair amount of friendship garnered from way back when. It might be childish, but those ties - especially as far back as they go- don't disappear just because both of them were assholes and hurtful.

Sometimes the bridges burnt aren't gone altogether.

There's something still salvageable, but Steve doesn't know if he really wants to put all the effort into building something back only to drop it once the four years are up and all the kids run away from this godforsaken town.

He knows Robin will always be worried about him, she knows about his soft underbelly he always needed tried to hide. She gets this look that makes him think she's looking at a kid when she says "You care about those shits too much sometimes ya know." but never does she say it like a question.

The phone rings twice before Steve hears "Hagan residence, who am I speakin to?"

Steve breathes, stealing himself before answering, "It's Steve."

Steve hears a faint whisper yell of "Carol get over here." before he hears Tommy clears his voice- bad habit his father had tried all but forced to get out of him- to nervously say "Steve, I um hey, uh how's it goin?"

Then he hears something like static before Carol the says a tad breathlessly, "Excuse him, Stevie we want to talk you in person" she then trips over her words spitting out quickly "or over the phone, whatever's best for you. "

That was a bit more forward than he's heard from them in a while, he forgot just how blunt Carol could be when she knew tact wasn't needed.

"I uh, how 'bout we talk a bit and um see."

"Sure, sure Stevie. We just, we just wanted to make things right again, ya know? The fucking mall *burnt down* and ..." she goes on but all Steve can here is the **mall burnt down**.

***The mall.***

He needed to it down.

His lungs and legs felt weak.

For a brief second he thought he was still strapped in the chair.

Even with the drugs coursing through Robin and Steve's veins, he knew they weren't going to come out of that room whole.

*He knew he wouldn't come out alive.*

The hairs that stood on the back of his neck and the tools they laid out on the table had distracted him, not even realizing that the blood from his nose and busted lip didn't even choke him wouldn't get the chance to.

"... and Steve? **Steve! Stevie?**"



He wasn't there anymore.

But so many people were.

"Yeah? Just sorta zoned out." Steve made to say causally, keeping the tremor from his voice.

"Fine, I won't bore you anymore, but fuck we just... we're *sorry* Steve. I don't know all the macho bullshit Tommy pulled trying to be Hargrove's bitch", Steve hears a bit of a fumble and an offended muffled hey from Tommy, "but I'm sorry for everything. I just, I know ya got this new girl Buckley attached to your hip, but you were one of my closest friends and I wished we never lost that." Her voice had petered out towards the end.

The sincerity is familiar and alien all at once. When they were younger, more kind, less sarcastic and bitter, kindness and truthfulness were given freely.

High school changed a lot for them but they still held onto each other like tethers. Until Steve had changed the status quo.

Eventually Tommy elbowed his way to the phone, evident by Carol's whispered and sharp *ow* .

"Steve, what Carol said, all of that, *being a bitch huh*" he mumbles the last part pointedly and quietly, before resuming, "but uh, I know I was dickhead, a real right bastard, but ... I'm sorry. It's just *we* know each other, *we* grew up together, birds of a feather ya know? Then you, then you got different, changed more than we saw but uh maybe we could get to know the rest of you..."

Steve surprisingly didn't feel trapped. He wasn't cornered by words or expectations and for once a minuscule part of him wanted to be, to make things easier and just forgive with nothing to it, but his life is more now.

Now there's the little shits running around needing guidance and monsters that don't stay under your bed.

“Yeah that uh sounds good. Maybe the diner someday. I need to see when I’m free.” Steve settled on saying at last.

Carol eagerly jumps in, “Sure Stevie, you know where to find us.”

Steve can feel the conversations strain on all three of them, so he cuts it off by softly saying, “I’ll reach out to ya soon.” He can feel his face being pulled into a small, tired smile.

“Yeah, talk to ya soon” they both agree.

Steve hangs up the phone.

The world didn’t implode, it’s still turning slowly away from the sun and the day is only half over.

Carol and Tommy might be back in Steve’s life.

He asked for it, made the bed and all, now he’s gotta make sure he can lie in it too.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

So school kicked my ass and work made sure I couldn’t do anything but eat, sleep, and work. Uh pacing, I realized now, will probably never be consistant. Thanks for those who stick around, more to come. Also this is annoying to do on mobile.